

Throughout his three years of ministry, Jesus said a lot. He spoke of God's steadfast love for us and about how we are to love one another; he spoke of how hard it can be to believe, to follow, or to choose God over things, power, or even ourselves. He told stories to help us understand what a faithful life looks like, how forgiveness heals not just others but also us; and the difference that is made when we lead and love with compassion, generosity and kindness, when we choose to share openly who we are, what we believe, and what we have. Jesus also spoke of the cost of faith: the risk of persecution, violence, and even death — especially as he told of the death he would experience. Jesus spoke the painful truth that he must die and the glorious, unimaginable truth that out of his death would come life — anew, again, for always.

And so, on this Good Friday, it may be disconcerting that Jesus is so quiet. Some interpreted his silence for weakness. His lack of defense, evidence enough. Jesus says little. But rising up from the prophet Isaiah come prophetic words that resonate, that point to painful truths of Jesus' death:

Despised. Rejected. Suffering. Discounted.

Oppressed. Afflicted.

He had done no violence; there was no deceit in his mouth.

In John's Passion, for those whom Jesus was an existential threat, we hear words of aggression, accusation and condemnation, mockery and scorn. For those present for whom Jesus was beloved, for whom Jesus was Lord and Savior, it had to feel too much to bear. It was too much to bear.

Rabbi Abraham Heschel said, "in every moment something sacred is at stake." Today, on this Good Friday, we once again stand at the foot of the cross. We stand with the women and the beloved disciple who bore witness, knowing that the end was near, and uncertain of what was to come. We stand with the disciples, consumed by fear and sorrow, shock and disbelief. The light that shone so brightly in Jesus — son, friend, rabbi, and Lord—was about to be extinguished, leaving only sorrow and doubt.

So here, today, like all generations of Christians who have stood where we are now standing, we find ourselves in the midst of our own "something sacred is at stake"

moment. For now the invitation before us to stay, to sit, to bear witness to perhaps the greatest love story of all time. We may ask ourselves, “what does this mean for me? And, how then am I to live?”

As we reflect deeply on how a love so vast and profound has saved us, we may acknowledge by his death, Jesus gives us permission to live without fear of death, but fully in the hope of new life.

*And*, we are also called to consider how best to hold and steward this sacred story. How might we, by our words and in our actions, choose to share the enormity of Jesus’ gift to us with others — Much is at stake, and we can make a difference.

Episcopal Bishop Stephen Charleson, an elder in the Choctaw nation, writes of the responsibility we have to hold *and* tell our sacred stories:

“When we share what we know and what we value, we spin a force of the spirit that reaches back to ancient campfires and out to a tomorrow we cannot yet imagine”

The Spirit reconnects us to the cross, to the pain and despair of those who stood watching, who were not aware of what we already know about the rest of the story. That around the corner, in just three days, Easter Lillies are ready to be placed and hallelujahs are chomping at the bit, waiting to be heralded to the rooftops.

The story we heard today ends in death, but the story that we steward does not end at the cross. It continues on to the empty tomb, to the resurrected Jesus, to the road to Emmaus and beyond. We cannot escape the truth that we are Easter people — and yet, in the sacred moment of Good Friday, we too stand at the foot of the Cross as we bear witness to the worst the world can do to the one who loved us so much, that he became one of us in order to teach us, contrary to our lived experience, that death is the pathway to life.

On this Good Friday, we stand together at the foot of the Cross, knowing that the way of the cross is part of the journey — not the destination. We know that without the cross, resurrection could not have happened. Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies, it bears fruit. So, let us today hold the incomprehensible, right here in our hands and our hearts. Let us allow it to cover and consume us, to pour over us, and to elicit from us the stark truth of our need for God, for grace and for love. For in the end, Love is stronger than death.